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Reagan's Secrecy Campaign

As he settled into Washington, nothing irritated Ronald Reagan more than the press leaks disclosing his secret policies and deliberations. Since then, Reagan has issued new rules pressuring the custodians of federal secrets to take polygraph exams, forcing them to sign secrecy contracts and compelling them to grant the government veto power over their sensitive writings—and the public debate—for a lifetime. Reagan's rules of silence pose a classic confrontation between free speech and national security, and last week Congress added its voice. In the extreme, warned Republican Sen. Charles Mathias of Maryland, the rules consign "some of our most talented and dedicated citizens to a virtual vow of silence on crucial national issues."

The broad scope of Reagan's secrecy campaign became clear only recently, when the Justice Department actually produced the detailed new contracts that secret holders are expected to sign. The more controversial document restricts employees cleared for "Sensitive Compartmented Information"—distributed on a strictly need-to-know basis. This secrecy elite may not go public with articles, books (even fiction) or letters to the editor on any classified matters until after a government review of the material. Even unclassified information on intelligence activities is subject to approval. The rule restricts at least 100,000 Defense Department officials alone—both on the job and in retirement.

Administration officials see more than enough reason to crack down on leakers. Loose-lipped insiders have turned Reagan's Central America offensive into a parody of covert warfare. Lesser-known compromises are just as rankling: when a ground-level photo of a Soviet bomber appeared in the journal *Aviation Week*, Washington worried that it helped Moscow confirm a U.S. intelligence penetration. In all, the steady drip-drip-drip has prompted CIA Director William Casey, White House counselor Edwin Meese III and national-security adviser William Clark, a former judge, to endorse a hang-'em-high policy.

But even granted that leaks can be damaging, the question is whether Reagan's reme-

dies are extreme. For one thing, his sanctions cover intelligence breaches that are relatively minor. Earlier this year, for example, the FBI investigated a Canadian reporter's dispatch on the widely distributed Pentagon report, "Air Force 2000," whose secret passages proved uniformly innocuous. An example: "Soviet military forces will continue to modernize and place strains on their domestic economy." FBI agents approached Canadian newspaperman Donald Sellar and asked him to identify his sources, but ultimately accepted his refusal to cooperate. Justice Department officials insist that they have no plans to prosecute the Canadian. (Several U.S. publications also obtained copies of "Air Force 2000," and NEWSWEEK easily obtained its own last week.)

Rights for 'Consumers': The threat for leakers is much greater than for the leaked-to. At last week's Senate hearing, former Carter White House counsel Lloyd Cutler urged

that Reagan stick largely to present policy, which already requires that CIA agents and other "producers" of secrets submit to prepublication review; intelligence "consumers" such as the secretary of state and other policymakers should be free to publish as they see fit, Cutler said. The administration insists that it will act responsibly. It is investigating only 15 to 20 leak cases—about the same number as two years ago. If Reagan's sanctions are designed more to scare off potential leakers than to clog the courts with them, the president may have made his point—but at the risk of a controversy that could reach constitutional proportions.

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